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## THE PLURALIZATION OF LATIN LOAN-WORDS IN PRESENT-DAY AMERICAN SPEECH

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The tendency to rid the vernacular of foreign plurals by pluralizing loan-words according to the native method has operated since the entry of the first loan-words into the language. The foreign plural tends to be preserved only when, as in *indices* beside the regularized *indexes*, it has taken on differentiation of meaning. Many recently regularized plurals are now so well established that even the classical specialist uses them without self-consciousness. *Formulas*, a novelty when employed by Carlyle, now seems as standard as *formulae*, and *funguses* and *cactuses* as *fungi* and *cacti*. It is of interest to watch the process of regularization in the living speech and to record the new words to which it is extended. There is always zest in observing linguistic phenomena, especially in following the transformations which are taking place under our eyes, as it were. To both the linguistic student and the lexicographer it is of value to survey the creation of new forms and to try to help fix the chronology of their acceptance.

For the most part, the materials for the following short paper have been drawn from oral sources. In some instances printed forms from newspapers or periodicals have been cited. The words which are listed entered the language mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A few, like *fungus*, *emporium*, appeared in written records in the sixteenth century, and a few others, like *curriculum*, first appeared in the nineteenth. The effort has been made to record and to group the new forms in a way that will exhibit the main tendencies in the popular treatment of Latin plurals. The habitual speaker of fair education has now little awe of classical loan-words. He rushes into whatever handling pleases him, without reluctance or thought or inquiry. No material

has been drawn from British sources. It is possible, though not very probable, that British usage is more conservative than American in the regularizing of classical plurals.

#### I. LATIN PLURALS USED AS SINGULARS

So firmly is *-s* established in the folk-mind as the normal plural ending that plurals which do not exhibit it seem to speakers to be singular. The following examples are not drawn from illiterate speakers but mainly from those having collegiate education. The usages are those of the fairly sophisticated. When these plurals used as singulars are themselves pluralized, the *-s* ending is added, as will be seen in another section.

1. The following plurals of Latin neuter nouns in *-um* are treated as singulars of the first declension feminine:

*curricula*—"The curricula of the institution is being altogether changed." Remark of a graduate student.

*data*—"Much data could be quoted as to the history of baseball in the University." "Such data is misleading." "This data is very significant." From articles for newspapers and pamphlets.

*dicta*—"This dicta, 'Go West,' is said to have come from Horace Greeley." Said by a platform speaker.

*emporia*—"There is a new clothing emporia on O street." Oral.

*insignia*—"That insignia is most attractive of all." "What is that insignia on his sleeve?" Said by onlookers at a procession.

*strata*—"This strata of the Latin loan-element in English comprises church words introduced by the coming of Roman missionaries." "This may be called the Renaissance strata of loan-words." From examination papers of graduate students.

2. The same tendency appears in a few words from the Greek. Like the preceding nouns from the Latin, they are given new plurals in *-s* by their users.

*criteria*—"That is no criteria as to the success of the course." Heard at an educational gathering.

*ganglia*—"The sensory nerve passes through a ganglia." From an examination paper.

*phenomena*—"What a strange phenomena." Oral.

3. In several instances the plurals of Latin masculines of the second declension appear as singulars.

*alumni*—"He is an alumni of the University of Indiana," writes a correspondent in the *Nebraska State Journal* of March 16, 1919. "As an alumni of the University of Nebraska, I shall surely be present at the semi-centennial" is a sentence from a letter. A slightly different usage, that which has become standardized in expressions like "a golf links," "a water-works," appears in "I want to keep in touch with the U. of N. Yours for a united and enthusiastic alumni." Letter to the *Alumni Journal* of the University of Nebraska, January, 1917.

*nuclei*—"This nuclei needs especial attention." "This nuclei contains chromatin." Written repeatedly in an examination paper. The writer used, several times, as the plural, the form *nuclei-i*.

*syllabi*—"First let me give you this syllabi and then this second syllabi." Spoken by a professor of education.

4. Reference may be made here to the new folk-etymological singular, *cosma*, from the Greek noun *cosmos*. It is of the same type as the folk-etymological singulars, *pea*, *burial*, *cherry*, etc., of the standard language.

*cosma*—"Pick a cosma." "What a beautiful cosma this is." "Mayn't I have this cosma?" The real singular, *cosmos*, then becomes plural: "Those are pretty cosmos."

Another new singular sometimes heard is

*gladiola* (accent on the second syllable)—"Let me see that gladiola." The plural is then *gladiolas*.

## II. CREATION OF DOUBLE PLURALS

The standard language has several plurals, vernacular and from the French, which are historically double plurals, as *quinces*, *invoices*, *kine*, *breeches*, and in dialect speech one sometimes hears *folkses*, *chilluns*, *childerns*, etc. Similarly double plurals are sometimes found among Latin loan-words.

1. There are several instances of the retention of the Latin neuter plural ending in *-a*, to which is added the vernacular plural sign *-s*.

*curriculas*—"I hope you will make a strong point of physical education in your curriculas." Speech of a football coach at a high-school convocation.

*insignias*—"Citizens ripped off the red insignias." *Lincoln* (Nebraska) *Evening News*, May 5, 1919.

*stratas*—"There are many stratas of the Latin loan-element in English." From an examination paper.

<sup>1</sup> See "Some Plural-Singular Forms," *Dialect Notes*, IV (1913), 48-50.

2. This tendency to create double plurals is especially marked in the treatment of masculine nouns of the Latin second declension. The Latin ending *-i* is retained in the plural, then *-s* added to *-i*.

*alumnis*—"Get out as many of the old *alumnis* as you can for the banquet." "There are many old *alumnis* in the city for Homecoming." Oral.

*bacillis*—"Don't drink water having typhoid *bacillis* when you are on that vacation." "Those fever *bacillis* are mighty dangerous." Oral.

*focis*—"There are various *focis* of infection." "Find the main *focis* of infection first thing." Heard in medical discussions.

*literatis*—"All the *literatis* of the burg will be there to meet the celebrity." Oral.

*narcissis*—"Narcissis for sale." From a florist's sign, 1919. No example of the singular "a *narcissi*" has come to my attention.

*stimulis*—"Now let us try these sense *stimulis*." "These *stimulis* have marked effect." Heard in the instructions given by student assistants in a psychological laboratory.

*syllabis*—"How many *syllabis* have I given out to you?" Question by a professor of education.

### III. CREATION OF *-s* PLURALS FROM LATIN SINGULARS

The addition of *-s* to the singular is the normal process in regularizing Latin plurals. Many plurals now standard have been created by it.

1. In the Latin first declension feminine, the same tendency which brought *formulas* beside *formulae*, and *amoebas* beside *amoebae*, brings:

*alumnas*—"Will many *alumnas* be back for the sorority banquet?" The shortened *alum*, feminine in application, never masculine, is heard in student usage. If universalized, this shortened form with its regularized plural, *alum*, *alums*, though it may not be "elegant," would do away with much confusion and many errors.

*antennas*—"The butterfly is said to have *antennas*." Student's usage.

*vertebras*—"What do you know of human *vertebras*?" Student's usage.

2. In the second declension masculine, many new plurals like *funguses*, *radiuses*, *cactuses*, are now well established. *Ignoramus*, a verb form, not a noun of this declension, has *ignoramuses* as its expected and proper plural, and so with *mandamus*. *Genuses* is standard in scientific usage beside *geni*, and *focuses* has long been

good beside *foci*. *Parnassuses* may also be termed standard. New plurals, occasionally heard, of this type are:

*alumnuses*—"Which are alumnuses and which are not?" "Will many alumnuses be back on Homecoming Day?" Heard on a campus.

*narcissuses*—This has supplanted the *narcissi* of Shelley's *The Sensitive Plant*, and is now the plural recognized in the dictionaries.

3. There is occasional regularization of the following fourth-declension noun, properly having the same plural as singular:

*apparatuses*—"What apparatuses shall I have to order?" Question asked by a student assistant in a laboratory. This plural appeared in written records in the nineteenth century, but it has made no great headway.

4. Regularized -s plurals of Latin neuter nouns, as *mediums* for *media*, are:

*curriculum*s—Adopted a few years ago by the National Education Association in place of *curricula*.

*emporium*s—"You'll find as many ready-to-wear things as you'll pay for in the garment emporiums along the main street." This is now the usual plural, in place of *emporia*, and, like *curriculum*s, does not count as dialectal.

Instead of *opera*, the neuter *opus* has occasionally for its plural:

*opuses*—"The opuses of American composers like MacDowell." Heard in a lecture.

5. Here may be added two Greek neuters which are assuming regularized plurals:

*criteria*s—"These are no true criterions of the success or failure of a man." From the speech of a professor. This plural was used in the eighteenth century, but it has not yet driven out *criteria*, perhaps because the word is infrequent in popular speech.

*phenomenons*—"I have heard of many strange phenomenons but of none stranger than that." A recognized plural in the nineteenth century, but rarely heard at the present time except in the phrase "infant phenomenons."

#### IV. NEW LATIN PLURALS

Transference of Latin nouns from one declension to another is not frequent; but a few examples are heard—apparently from those having some knowledge of the language and ambitious to speak it with precision.

*apparati*—"Set up your apparati." Heard in a chemical laboratory.

*rebi*—"Do you study the rebi in the Sunday Journal?" The nominative *rebus* is originally an oblique case, and both the standard *rebuses* and the occasionally heard *rebi* are interesting formations.

*Veni*—"Professor, which is your favorite among the Veni?" From a lecturer's anecdote of a young Cambridge lady, who made inquiry of her professorial cicerone, as they wandered among the de Milo's and de Medici's of a gallery.

#### V. MISCELLANEOUS

Not germane to the subject of plurals but deserving record apropos of the treatment of classical loan-words in present usage, are the following forms:

*baccalaurium*—"Who gives the baccalaurium address?" "Who is the speaker for our high school baccalaurium?" Heard several times in 1919.

*exit*—This third singular of a Latin verb established itself as an English noun long ago, and now the noun has become an English verb. It occurs as an infinitive, to *exit*, has the new third singular *exits*, as in "he exits," appears in the plural present, "they exit" (*exeunt* is unknown), has the preterite *exited*, and the participle *exiting*.

*fugit*—This third singular of a verb is now regularly conjugated, in jocular usage, in the one expression *tempus fugit*, "tempus is fugiting," "thus tempus fugited." Examples may be found in print.

*symporium*—"They expect to hold a symporium at the club Friday night." Used several times by a speaker. Probably a crossing of *symposium* and *emporium*.